EMPOWERMENT OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN DIGITAL INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Empowerment is multidimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power in people for using their own lives, their communities and in their society, by acting on issues they define as important. The Digital India programme was started with a transformational vision to convert India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. Tribal development in India has been a persisting issue in social, political, educational and economic inclusion in the main stream of society. Women in a tribal society play a vital role in their social, cultural, economic and religious ways of life and are considered as an economic asset in their society. But they are still lagging far behind in the various walks of life like education, employment, good health and economic empowerment etc. Empowering may be understood as enabling weaker sections like poor women, especially tribal women to lead their life to acquire and to possess power and resources, in order to make decisions of their own. This paper discusses the problems and issues of tribal women empowerment, their status in present day society and role of Digital India in empowering the status of tribal women.

KEYWORDS: Empowerment, Tribal women, Digital India.

INTRODUCTION:

Empowering the status of women in a society is a remarkable reflection of Social Justice of the Society. Women belong to the half of total population but in Tribal society women are important rather than in other social group because economy and management of family depend on them and they are very hard workers. Industrialization and Commercialization affected the economy of tribal people, so the women continued to play crucial role in contributing to family income by collecting forest produce things like wood, Saal leaf, Tendu (Kendu) leaf etc. Many also work as labour in industries, households and construction of buildings.

CONCEPT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

The concept of empowerment is a process by increasing the degree of autonomy and self -determination in people and society in order to enable them to represent their interests and wishes in a responsible and self-determined way, acting on their own authority. It is a multidimensional process which enables individuals to realize their full identity and power in all sphere of life and consists of greater access to sources and knowledge, greater autonomy in decision making which enable them to have the ability to plan their lives, or have greater control over the situations which influence their lives and be free from customs, beliefs and practices. Welfare and development of any society depends on women empowerment. It is felt that development of a society is not possible without women empowerment in the right direction and at a desired pace. Even sustainable development is impossible without women empowerment. Mainly empowerment of women is associated with gender justice and gender equality. Women empowerment means equipping women to be economically independent, self-reliant and to have a sound attitude to deal difficult situations. Women empowerment means entitlement of women to have and enjoy power over their lives both as individual as well as members of society.

CHALLENGES IN EMPOWERMENT OF TRIBAL WOMEN:

Tribes are more sincere and honest than others and hence, they have been exploited most of the time by their managers, contractors and other higher class people of society. Tribal women have adjusted themselves to live a traditional life style with local environment and choose occupations based on natural resources. Due to environmental degradation and interference of outsider in their culture and livelihood, tribal people face many problems and challenges in getting a decent life and sustainable livelihood. The strategy for development of tribal people, especially for women needs betterment, improvement and development in government policy and initiatives to affect their education, health, and socio-economic aspect of life to make them empowered.

INEQUALITY IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:

Political participation is one of the key ways to ensure women empowerment by increasing decision-making power and greater ability and also to influence matters which affect their lives in the community as well as in the greater society. Degree of women and men taking active participation in economic, professional and political activities and taking part in decision making determines gender empowerment. Earlier because of tradition only men were constantly educated and trained for leadership, while very fewer rural women had the opportunity to pursue their education. In village communities, women themselves had been influenced and had little belief in their own capacities to take leadership roles (Nagaraja, 2017). In 21st century also women are not completely empowered although Government is taking so many initiatives. Many women participate in politics in paper pen only but decisions are taken by the male persons.

ECONOMIC CONSTRAINT:

Marginalized group's economic empowerment involves both the process of creation of socio-political space for these groups by the state and civil society and the process of liberalization from man-made bondage through sustained struggle and resistance. The issue of economic empowerment is also linked with equality, liberty and fraternity etc. the tribal women being economically poor and socially backward live low level of scale of quality life. Often they face the problems of food insecurity, malnutrition, lack of access of health care services and education and also become the victim of domestic violence and rape. Though we are in 21st century, tribal community and tribal women lag far behind social networking. In India, this is the nature and dimension of disempowerment problem among the tribal women (Bhukya, 2015).

DECISION MAKING:

In the view point of women empowerment the power to take decision is extremely important because it is often seen that their voice is not perfectly listened. Women should not deprived of the power of decision making. The development of a country as well as communities cannot take place without active involvement of women. According to NSSO in capitalist countries, 71%-75% women participate in organization while in India only 4% women participate in organization though women cover 48.02% of total population (2011 census). 32.82% women live in rural area (2011 census).

MARITAL STATUS AND AGE:

One important factor that determines the level of autonomy among female in any community is marital status which indicates whether a person is married, unmarried or a widow. Basically, in our society which is male dominated , a majority of widows who lose breadwinner of the family have taken the whole responsibility of their family upon themselves. Research reveals that widows have more decision making power than others but they also face insecurities and noncooperation etc. Married females have less decision making role in comparison to unmarried females. In tribal community, females marry early due to lack of knowledge about what is the right age of marriage. Due to early marriage they do not get sufficient time for their education which badly affects their married life. They become unaware about the health issue and suffer many health issues like anemia, mal- nutrition during pregnancy etc.

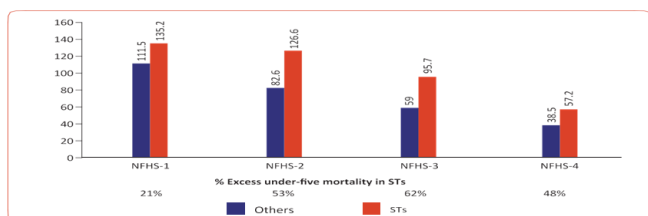## VIOLENCE AGAINST TRIBAL WOMEN:

Tribal women most of the times are in high risk to violence, exploitation, discrimination, unequal economic and social status and have lack of conducive environment in the field of socio-cultural and economic contexts of power (Kelkar, 1991). A small proportion of the crimes of sexual assault, child abuse and physical assaults have been reported because of the complexity of economic and social issue with combined stigma and fear of discloser. Violence like female foeticide and infanticide seems to be absent in Tribal community due to their strict social

norms (National organization for women, 2012).

HEALTH ISSUE:

Because of variety reasons, tribal health is not good as compared to the health of general population.There is need of women empowerment to bridge the gap in various aspects (Muniyandi and Singh, 2014). Infant mortality rate of scheduled tribe is highest among indigenous population.　The Following graph represents the comparison of under-five Mortality in STs and Others during past 25 Years.

Comparison of Under-five Mortality in STs and Others during Past 25 Years

Others comprise the population excluding ST, SC & OBC

NFHS- National Family Health Survey, NFHS-1-1988, NFHS-2-1994, NFHS-3-2004, NFHS-2014

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT:

Social, cultural and health development are determined by universally recognized powerful instrument that is education. The rate of tribal women who never attended school was highest. Now it has gradually increased but there is gender disparity at different level of education. Financial constraint, early marriage, submissiveness, motherhood and parent's narrowed perception regarding girl education etc. are the reasons associated with not imparting education to girl child. Educating a female child is deliberately avoided that affects the future opportunity for her all- round development. The tribal women are very backward in education attainment as compared to the others. The literacy rates among STs and ALL and Drop-out rates in school education for Scheduled Tribe students are showing below.

Table 1: Literacy Rates among STs and ALL

Year	All			Scheduled Tribes		
	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females
1961	28.30	40.40	15.35	8.53	13.83	3.16
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	11.30	17.63	4.85
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	16.35	24.52	8.04
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	29.60	40.65	18.19
2001	64.84	75.26	53.67	47.10	59.17	34.76
2011	73.00	80.90	64.60	59.00	68.50	49.40

Source: Office of the Registrar General, India

Table 2: Drop-Out Rates in School Education for Scheduled Tribe Students

Year/Classes	Classes I-V			Classes I-VIII			Classes I-X		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
2011-12	36.1	34.4	35.3	57.3	57.1	57.2	64.4	67.6	65.9
2012-13 (P)	33.3	31.2	32.3	50.6	47.5	49.2	63.2	62.2	62.7
2013-14 (P)	31.9	30.7	31.3	49.8	46.4	48.2	63.2	61.4	62.4

Source: Educational Statistics at a Glance, Dept. of School Education, MHRD.

ROLE OF DIGITAL INDIA INITIATIVES IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

Following are the major initiatives in Digital India by Government of India for women empowerment.

i) **Mother and Child Tracking System (MCTS-2009):** This initiative taken by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the application was developed by National Informatics Centre which uses information technology for ensuring delivery of full variety of healthcare and immunization services to pregnant women and children having below five years age. It provides communication between beneficiaries and service sources. A dashboard is provided by the application to provide information to health mangers at different levels to ensure quality service delivery. It is also useful for universal immunization and micro birth planning.

ii) **Beti Bachao and Beti Padhao Campiagn:** Government of India announced Beti Bachao and Beti Padhao initiative in 2015 to deal with declining child sex ratio. The main aim of this Campaign is guaranturing girls born, nurtured and educated without discrimination. It is a joint activity of Ministry of Women and Child development, Ministry of Human Resource Development and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and it being implemented in hundred selected districts where child sex ratio is very low. To prevent gender biased sex selective elimination, to ensure protection of the girl child and to ensure education and participation of girl child are the prime objectives of the campaign.

iii) **Mahila E-Haat:** It is an online platform helpful for women entrepreneurs, women NGOs and Self Help Group which started in 2016. This online platform is useful for showcasing the products which are manufactured by women. It facilitates direct contact between customer and seller and on date women entrepreneurs from 24 states are showcasing more than two thousand products. It provides provision for eighteen categories of product including clothing, bags, home décor, carpets, rugs, foot mats, fashion accessories, jewellery, decorative and gift items, baskets, boxes, pottery, grocery, cushion covers, staples, organic, natural products, file folders, soft toys, industrial products, educational aids, and miscellaneous items. It is useful for more than three lakh beneficiaries directly or indirectly.

iv) **Women Helpline Scheme, 2016:** Under this scheme a toll free number is given where girls or women complains about violence against them in any sphere of life including both private and public sectors. It provides twenty four hours service and also give information about women scheme and welfare programmes. Further, this scheme facilitates intervention in crisis and non- crisis situations by directing hospitals, police, protection officers, ambulance and local district level authorities.

v) **Stand-Up India Scheme for financing SC/ST and/or Women Entrepreneurs:** Stand-Up India Scheme was launched in April 2016. It is anchored by the DFS (Department of Financial Services) under the overall supervision of the Ministry of Finance. This initiative aimed at boosting the entrepreneurial capabilities of the SC/St and women. It is typically designed to facilitate Stand Up India Loan to the eligible entrepreneurs who qualify for assistance from the banks and NBFCs. Stand-Up India scheme aimed to remove and acknowledge the challenges faced by members of the SC/ST community and women entrepreneurs by facilitating bank loans between 10 lakh and 1 Crore to at least one Scheduled Caste (SC) or Scheduled Tribe (ST) borrower and at least one woman borrower per bank branch for setting up a greenfield enterprise comprising of services, manufacturing or trade etc.

vi) **Prime Minister Gramin Digital Saksharata Abhiyan (PMGDSA-2017):** It is a scheme implemented to make six crore people digitally literate of different states and union territories. The main aim of the scheme is to make one person digitally literate in one family and to reach over forty percent of households in rural areas. This scheme helps to make a women or man train in such a way that they can operate a smart phone or a tablet or any computing devices and make them capable enough to browse internet, make digital payments and send and receive e-mails. The prime concentration of this scheme is on marginalized sections like Scheduled Tribe, Scheduled Caste, Minorities, , people belong to below poverty line and women.

vii) **GOAL (Going Online as Leaders, 2019):** GOAL (Going Online as Leaders) is a digitally-enabled mentorship initiative of Facebook in association with Union Ministry of Tribal Affair for empowering tribal youth to become leaders for tomorrow in the respective fields. It aims at inspiring, guiding and encouraging tribal girls from across India to become village-level digital young leaders for their communities. GOAL connects underprivileged young tribal women with senior expert mentor in the areas of business, fashion and arts to learn digital and life skills.

viii) **Samriddhi – Scheme for SC/ST Students for Setting Start-Ups:** Looking at the poor job availability in the market, All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) invites online applications from AICTE approved institutes/ Universities/Departments under the schemes of quality improvement to provide opportunities for SC/ST students to start their own enterprise. The broad objective of this scheme is to help SC/ST students in designing, launching and running their own business/startup through entrepreneurship development programme after formal education is over/during their education as per AICTE's startup policy.Under the scheme, the students will learn many things such as designing their business, launching of their enterprise, running it successfully and further support with respect to business.

CONCLUSION:

Any process of development is the magnification of assets and capabilities of rural women to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold the institution accountable that affects their lives. Therefore there is a need of improvement in the quality of life of vulnerable sections of the Indian population by the Government and civil society. So more importance should be given to the

development process of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe including women by providing welfare schemes and programmes. These people are economically backward, therefore there is a need for solemn efforts on the part of the government to help improve the quality of life. By empowering rural women through universally recognized instrument i.e. education and proper implementation of digital initiatives can thus enable them to live with dignity and self -reliance cutting across the barriers of customary biases and prejudices, social barrier of caste, class, gender, occupation and institutional barriers that prevent them from taking actions to improve their state both at the individual and collective level.

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